

Five Point Bulletin



North Star of Texas Writing Project Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 4

December 2017

As the year comes to a close, I asked newsletter contributors to consider the idea of “the one thing” - that one thing that makes a difference in our lives, our students’ lives, and to the world. I hope you enjoy these responses as much as I did, and I look forward to sharing *your* writing in our first newsletter of the new year.

Happy holidays from North Star! ~Amber Counts

One Thing... by Holly Genova

The one thing I wish the world knew about teaching is why teachers teach. I ask myself this question and also answer the same question in many different social settings: Why do we continue to teach when we are bombarded from all sides?

Thinking of this question I remember the words of former Dallas Police Chief, David Brown.

Not enough mental health funding, let the [teachers] cops handle it. Not enough drug addiction funding, let's give it to the [teachers] cops. Schools fail, give it to the [teachers] cops. 70 percent of the African-American community is being raised by single women, let's give it to the [teachers] cops to solve as well.

Which leads me to another question: why do we continue to fight the good fight?

- We continue because we know education guards against injustice.
- We continue because we know teachers are agents of change.
- We continue because we know it falls to us to help our students find their voice through reading and writing.
- We continue because we know teaching students to analyze and support arguments with evidence criticizes those who do not.
- We continue because we know that our democracy continues through compassion, conversation, deep thinking, and inquiry.

Simply put, the one reason we continue to fight the good fight is we want to change the world, one student at a time.

“We continue because we know that our democracy continues through compassion, conversation, deep thinking, and inquiry.”

- Holly Genova



Inside this issue:

One Thing—by Holly Genova	1
The One Thing—by Whitney Kelley	2
Tikkun Olam: Repair the World—by Amber Counts	3
Publication Information	4



The One Thing, by Whitney Kelley

This has been perhaps the most difficult, most challenging, most bizarre, most enlightening, most disheartening, most troublesome, and most tiring semester of my entire teaching career. As a new “empty-nester,” I’ve struggled with my role now not having either of my kids at home (or at school – they both attended the high school where I teach), and I find myself busy, but not feeling like I’m accomplishing anything.



A random confluence of factors out of my control – Hurricane Harvey that affected both my parents and my college freshman, multiple scares and a tragedy at my son’s college, a terrifying personal encounter that resulted in an abominable betrayal, and on and on and on – I must admit that I have completely lost my footing. I find it hard to focus on lessons, both in the micro and the macro. I find it difficult to think through the continuity and trajectory of the target skills and content for my two preps. I find it a challenge to trust anyone, particularly myself.

But then, this one thing turned up in my mailbox yesterday. For whatever reason, it has given me a measure of peace and purpose that I was desperately seeking but never finding.

Thank you for always telling us to have a nice day; that we make your day better; and that you love us, because it’s very motherly and warming, and I don’t really have my mom in my life. So thank you for being this for us because it’s like I get a sense of having a mother to look forward to seeing every day.

Holy smokes.

So many days, I have woken up wondering what in the world I am contributing to the classroom. So many nights I have gone to bed wondering why on earth I will get up and go back to the daily tasks that seem so futile.

And yet now, I have a reason. And maybe it’s only one reason. Maybe this kid is the only person who is benefiting from my silly sayings at the end of class, “Have a good day children whom I adore. Be seekers of knowledge, purveyors of wisdom and speakers of kindness. Eat your vegetables. Drink plenty of fluids. Wear your seatbelts. Don’t text and drive. Yield the right of way. Don’t sit too close to the TV.” The kids add other statements periodically, and I try to weave them in. They laugh, but wish me farewell as they leave. It’s always been a silly signature to the end of what can be an intellectually heavy class. But I see that what I’ve taken for granted as actually taken root in at least one kid’s heart. What some kids find foolish and eye-roll worthy is actually nurturing to at least one soul.

I cannot change who I am. I am hard-wired to be authentically “me:” Lover of language, demanding in expectations, and expressive with commentary. I am passionate about the power of communication, and that is the *one thing* that motivated me to leave my job as a PR professional and become a classroom teacher.

It is the *one thing* that many children find bothersome (oh, those dratted expectations!)

But, knowing that *who I am* provides a sense of care, love, value and warmth to at least one of these students, I can live with that. It is more than likely the *one thing* that will propel me through what has otherwise proven to be a quite bleak school year.



Tikkun Olum: Repair the World, by Amber Counts

As a newcomer to the 2017 NWP and NCTE conferences, I walked around in a perpetual state of astonishment and sensory overload. The one refrain that reverberated through my mind, other than “free books,” was the concept of *Tikkun Olum*, roughly translated as “repair the world.” First conveyed during the NWP plenary and repeated by several presenters throughout the NCTE conference, I had heard this phrase previously through my Holocaust studies coursework at UT Dallas and through training with the Holocaust Educator Network. The phrase represents a belief which I hold dear, but hearing it again from a variety of presenters at the conferences underscored just how important it is for each of us to repair the parts of the world in which we live.

Teachers have the unique opportunity to encourage young people to do the same, as most of us see over one hundred children daily throughout the school-year and spend more time with them, on average, than the other adults in their lives do. What if we could bolster students’ empathy through reading and discussion and then – more importantly – empower them to go forth and “repair the world”? As teachers of English and language arts, we understand the importance between the texts we read and their real-world implications. We understand patterns in society and how literature warns us not to repeat mistakes of the past in a much more human way than history does. We understand the power of language to change the world.

How do we get our kids to see these things? We must take the time to have our students make connections between the texts they read and themselves, their friends, family, community, country, world, and humanity as a whole. We must provide context for what they read and connect fiction with non-fiction – in both fiction and non-fiction

based courses. Bring news articles into AP Literature and bring some poetry into a class built around non-fiction, for example. We must empower our students to see themselves as readers, writers, thinkers, and feelers by not simply providing them with opportunities to write authentic pieces for real audiences, but *expecting* them to do so. We must encourage risk-taking as they find their voices and resist the urge to beat them down with formulaic writing and artificial writing scenarios. Why not have high school English students practice writing letters to senators, or have students submit their poetry to national publications? Students could create public service announcement films and publish them on YouTube. The possibilities are endless, but imagine the engagement and ownership students will experience with these examples versus writing to another STAAR prompt. We can still help them hone their craft along the way, but students would learn that there is power in their writing.

While empowering students to make change with the written word, we must also help them develop as oral communicators. This nation is in crisis. The adults no longer know how to engage in civil discourse. So what hope do our kids have, who spend most of their time avoiding “awkward” social interactions while they stare instead at phone screens? We must make conversation a centerpiece of our classrooms. Learning to engage each other respectfully – especially when we disagree – is perhaps the most powerful way that we can prepare our students to repair the world.





www.northstaroftexaswritingproject.org

Contact Us!

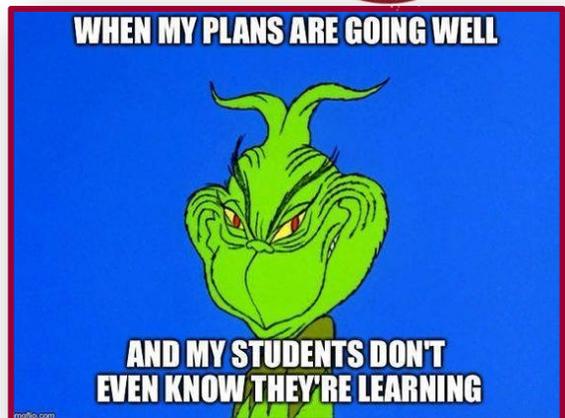
NSTWP.Denton@gmail.com

Follow us on Twitter: @NorthStarTxWP

Like us on Facebook: North Star of Texas Writing Project—a National Writing Project Site

For newsletter entries, comments, or questions, please contact Amber Counts, newsletter editor, at ambercounts@gmail.com.

Entries for the next edition are due by February 28th, 2018.



Hello, educators and colleagues! Special thanks to all of our newsletter contributors for this issue. We all have interesting stories, reflections on teaching experiences or strategies, creative writing pieces, lesson plan ideas, or upcoming opportunities to share. If you would like to have a piece published in the next newsletter, please send it in according to the schedule listed below. I am looking for anything that will help your fellow educators or inspire them in some way. Let's make this a great resource for our writing and teaching community!

Send entries to: ambercounts@gmail.com with "newsletter" in the subject line

Submissions due: by February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, and November 30th

Corresponding Publication dates: *On or around:* March 5th, June 5th, September 5th and December 5th